

Sūrah Al-Ghāshiyah

(The Overwhelming Event)

This Sūrah is Makki, and it has 26 verses

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

With the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Very-Merciful

Verses 1 - 26

هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ الْغَاشِيَةِ ﴿١﴾ وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ خَاشِعَةٌ ﴿٢﴾ عَامِلَةٌ
 نَاصِبَةٌ ﴿٣﴾ تَصَلَّى نَارًا حَامِيَةً ﴿٤﴾ تُسْقَى مِنْ عَيْنٍ آنِيَةٍ ﴿٥﴾ لَيْسَ
 لَهُمْ طَعَامٌ إِلَّا مِنْ ضَرِيعٍ ﴿٦﴾ لَا يُسْمِنُ وَلَا يُغْنِي مِنْ جُوعٍ ﴿٧﴾
 وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَاعِمَةٌ ﴿٨﴾ لِسَعْيِهَا رَاضِيَةٌ ﴿٩﴾ فِي جَنَّةٍ عَالِيَةٍ ﴿١٠﴾ لَا
 تَسْمَعُ فِيهَا لَاغِيَةً ﴿١١﴾ فِيهَا عَيْنٌ جَارِيَةٌ ﴿١٢﴾ فِيهَا سُرُرٌ مَرْفُوعَةٌ
 ﴿١٣﴾ وَأَكْوَابٌ مَوْضُوعَةٌ ﴿١٤﴾ وَنَمَارِقُ مَصْفُوفَةٌ ﴿١٥﴾ وَزَرَابِيُّ
 مَبْثُوثَةٌ ﴿١٦﴾ أَفَلَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَى الْإِبْلِ كَيْفَ خُلِقَتْ ﴿١٧﴾ وَإِلَى
 السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ ﴿١٨﴾ وَإِلَى الْجِبَالِ كَيْفَ نُصِبَتْ ﴿١٩﴾ وَإِلَى
 الْأَرْضِ كَيْفَ سُطِحَتْ ﴿٢٠﴾ فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ ﴿٢١﴾ لَسْتَ
 عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصَيْطِرٍ ﴿٢٢﴾ إِلَّا مَنْ تَوَلَّى وَكَفَرَ ﴿٢٣﴾ فَيُعَذِّبُهُ اللَّهُ الْعَذَابَ
 الْأَكْبَرَ ﴿٢٤﴾ إِنَّ إِلَيْنَا إِيَابُهُمْ ﴿٢٥﴾ ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا حِسَابَهُمْ ﴿٢٦﴾

Has there come to you the description of the Overwhelming Event? [1] Many faces on that day will be humbled, [2] working hard, exhausted. [3] They will enter

into the scorching fire. [4] They will be made to drink water from a boiling spring. [5] There will be no food for them except from a thorny plant [6] that will neither nourish, nor satisfy hunger. [7] Many faces on that day will be full of glamour, [8] well pleased with their endeavour, [9] in a lofty garden, [10] in which they will not hear any absurd talk. [11] In it there is a running spring. [12] In it there are couches, elevated, [13] and goblets, well placed [14] and cushions, arrayed [15] and carpets, spread around. [16]

So, do they not look at the camels how they are created, [17] and at the sky, how it is raised high, [18] and at the mountains, how they are installed, [19] and at the earth, how it is spread out? [20] So, keep on preaching; you are only a preacher. [21] You are not a taskmaster set up over them, [22] but whoever turns away and disbelieves, [23] Allah will punish him with the greatest torment. [24] Surely towards Us they have to return, [25] then it is Our job to call them to account. [26]

Commentary

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ خَاشِعَةٌ. عَامِلَةٌ نَّاصِبَةٌ (Many faces on that day will be humbled, working hard, exhausted...88:3). On the Day of Judgement, there will be two separate groups of people, believers and unbelievers, and their faces will be different. This verse describes the faces of the unbelievers. They will be downcast. The word *khāshi'ah* from the root word *khushā'* means 'to humble, humiliate, cast down'. This is the meaning of casting oneself down before Allah in prayer. People who did not cast themselves down before Allah in this world, their faces on the Day of Judgement will be downcast with humiliation and disgrace.

The other conditions of the unbelievers are *'āmilah* and *nāṣibah*. The word *'āmilah* from *'āmal* means 'to work hard' and *'āmil* or *'āmilah* in Arabic is used for 'a person who works continuously, so as to become completely tired'. The word *nāṣibah* is derived from *nasab*. This word also refers to 'one who toils unceasingly so as to become totally exhausted'. It seems that the latter two conditions of the unbelievers relate to this world, because Hereafter is not a realm in which one has to work to become so tired and exhausted. Therefore, Qurṭubī and other commentators are of the view that the humbleness of their faces relates to the Hereafter, but their working hard and being exhausted refers to their work in this world. Given this interpretation, the sense is that many unbelievers exert

themselves in their false rituals, and work hard in their presumed acts of worship in the world, as for instance the Hindu Yogis and many Christian monks do. They endure many difficulties in the devotional acts of worship sincerely in order to seek the good pleasure of Allah, but being on wrong and idolatrous ways, they are not acceptable to, or rewarded by, Allah. Thus their faces show signs of exhaustion in this world; and in the Hereafter they will show signs of disgrace and humiliation.

Sayyidnā Ḥasan Baṣrī رحمه الله تعالى reports that when Sayyidnā ‘Umar ؓ went to Syria, a Christian monk came to him. He was an old man, and on account of his religious exercises and great endeavours, his face was exhausted, his body was dry and his dressing was miserable. When Sayyidnā ‘Umar ؓ looked at him, he began to weep. People asked him about the cause of his weeping. He replied: "I pity the condition of this old man. This poor soul worked so hard and showed such readiness to lay down his life to achieve a particular purpose (that is, to gain the pleasure of Allah) but, alas! He could not achieve it. Then he recited the following verse:

وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ خَاشِعَةٌ. عَامِلَةٌ نَّاصِبَةٌ

Many faces on that day will be humbled, 'working hard, exhausted. [88:2-3]

نَارًا حَامِيَةً (...[the] scorching fire...88:4). The word *ḥāmiyah* literally means 'hot' and 'scorching'. Although this is the natural property of fire that needed no mention, yet the specific reference to this quality of the fire brings out the point that the fire of Hell cannot be compared to the fire of this world. The heat of the fire of this world, some time or the other, is reduced or ends. But the fire of Hell is everlasting and eternal. Its heat will neither reduce nor end.

لَيْسَ لَهُمْ طَعَامٌ إِلَّا مِنْ ضَرِيعٍ (There will be no food for them except from a thorny plant...88:6) The only food available for the inmates of Hell would be *ḍarī‘*. In the world, this is a kind of thorny grass that spreads on the ground. No animal goes near it. It is foul-smelling, poisonous and thorny. [As interpreted by ‘Ikrimah, Mujāhid, and quoted by Qurṭubī].

How will Grass or Tree Survive in Hell

One may ask the question that the grass or trees are among things that burn in fire. How will they survive in Hellfire? The answer is that

the Supreme Creator Who cherished and sustained them in this world with water and air, has the power and ability to make the fire itself the nutrient of these trees, so that they may flourish.

Another question may be raised here. The Qur'ān mentions several things as the food of the inmates of Hell. Here it refers to their food as *ḍarī'*. On another occasion, it refers to *zaqqūm*, and on a third occasion it refers to *ghislīn*. This verse restricts their food to *ḍarī'*, thus: 'There will be no food for them except from a thorny plant...88:6)

The answer is that the restriction in this verse is in contrast to a palatable food that may be fit for [human] consumption. *Ḍarī'* is cited here as an example. The verse means that the inmates of Hell will not get any palatable food. They will get worst, most disgusting and loathsome food like *ḍarī'*. Thus the purpose of mentioning *ḍarī'* is not restriction. In fact, *ḍarī'* includes *zaqqūm* and *ghislīn*. Qurṭubī says that it is possible there will be different levels in Hell, and on different levels there will be different kinds of food. On one level, there will be *ḍarī'* and on another level, *ghislīn*, and so on.

لَا يُسْمِنُ وَلَا يُغْنِي مِنْ جُوعٍ (that will neither nourish, nor satisfy hunger...88:7). When the preceding verse was revealed in which it was stated that the inmates of Hell will get food like *ḍarī'*, some of the pagans of Makkah [mockingly] said that their camels eat *ḍarī'* and yet they are fat and healthy. In response to their statement, the following verse of the Qur'ān was revealed which means that they should not compare the *ḍarī'* of this world with that of the Hereafter. The latter will neither provide nutrition, nor satisfy their hunger.

لَا تَسْمَعُ فِيهَا لَاغِيَةً (in which they will not hear any absurd talk...88:11). It includes the words of disbelief, futile or idle talk, obscene language, calumny or false accusation, or any other talk that hurts people's feelings. On another occasion, the Qur'ān puts it thus:

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا تَأْثِيمًا

'They will hear neither an absurd talk therein, nor something leading to sin, [56:25]

This shows that false accusation and absurd talks are hurtful. That is why the Holy Qur'ān has described it as a blessing to the inmates of Paradise that no such foolish words will come across their ears that may

pollute their hearts.

Etiquette of Living

وَكَؤُوبٌ مَّوضُوعَةٌ (and goblets, well placed...88:14) The word *akwāb* is the plural of *kūb* and it refers to a 'goblet', a 'glass' or a cup for drinking water. It has been qualified by the adjective *mauḍū'ah* and it means 'well placed'. This signifies that the glasses or cups or containers will be set in their due places close to water. This description opens an important chapter in setting down some of the rules of correct behaviour in social situations. The drinking containers for water ought to be placed near the water in the designated place. They should not be misplaced so that the other members of the household will have to look for them when they wish to drink water. This situation is irritating. Other household items of daily use, such as cans, glasses, towels, and so on, should be arranged in their designated places, and after using them, they must be kept back in their respective places, so that the other members of the household do not face any difficulty in finding them out. All this is deducible from the word *mauḍū'ah* 'well placed', because Allah has arranged the goblets near the water for the comfort of the inmates of Paradise.

أَفَلَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَى الْإِبِلِ كَيْفَ خُلِقَتْ (So, do they not look at the camels how they are created...88:17) The Qur'ān first described the conditions of the Hereafter; and it then went on to depict the reward of the believers and the retribution of the unbelievers. Now it turns attention to rebuff the obdurate unbelievers' foolish denial of the Hereafter. They reject it on the ground that after death and decomposition of the body and bones it is inconceivable that they would be recomposed and resurrected. For their guidance, Allah invites their attention to reflect carefully on a few of His Signs. There are uncountable Signs of Allah in the universe. These verses refer to four of them specifically which suited the condition of the desert Arabs. They often travelled through the desert. In such a situation, all they saw were camels they travelled on. They mounted camels and covered long journeys. Above them was the sky and beneath them was the earth. All around them [left, right, front and back] they saw mountains. The Arabs are commanded to ponder over these four natural phenomena which make Allah's might manifest.

Among animals, the camel has certain peculiar characteristics that can be a reflection of Divine wisdom and power. It is the largest, most

robust and durable animal. Although elephant is a much larger animal than the camel, Allah has mentioned the camel rather than the elephant, because the Arabs knew camels and scarcely saw an elephant. Despite the fact that a camel is such a huge animal, a Bedouin Arab will not find it difficult to look after it even if he is poor. If he is unable to gather or afford food for it, it has to be let loose and will gather its own nutriment and live on leaves. It has a long neck to reach the tops of the high trees. The food of elephants and other animals work out expensive. In Arabian deserts, water is a scarce commodity. It is not available everywhere or anytime. Yet it can survive for about a week without water as Allah's Power has provided it with a small narrow-mouthed pouch in its paunch in which it stores up extra water [which it uses up gradually for seven to eight days]. Thus it is a superb draught beast. Nature has created it uniquely, so that it is perfectly adapted to survive the hazards of the harsh climate of the desert.

There is no need to set up a ladder to climb up the high animal. Allah has divided its legs into three levels. Each leg has two knees that it manoeuvres to sit down so that it becomes easier for riders to climb up and down. It is the chief beast of burden in deserts, and as such, it is able to carry large loads. It is most difficult to travel in daytime in Arabia because of scorching sunlight. Allah has made it possible for the camel to keep on travelling the whole night. Camels are so obedient that that even a little child can lead them along anywhere. Camels are very valuable to them in many other ways that teach man that Allah is Omnipotent and has consummate wisdom.

In conclusion of the Chapter, the Messenger of Allah is comforted thus:

لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصَيِّرٍ (You are not a taskmaster set up over them,...88:22)
The Holy Prophet ﷺ is told that he is only a preacher, and as such he must keep on preaching. He should not worry beyond that. It is for Allah to call the unbelievers to Him to render account of their deeds and actions, and punish them accordingly.

Alḥamdulillah
The Commentary on
Sūrah Al-Ghāshiyah
Ends here